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“Any leadership would have to be the type of Frederick Douglass”

Black History, Black Heroism, and Black Resistance in

Jacob Lawrence’s *Frederick Douglass* Series (1938-39)

Celeste-Marie Bernier

“The inspiration to paint the Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman and John Brown series was motivated by historical events as told to us by the adults of our community,” declares Jacob Lawrence, a history painter and social justice activist.<sup>1</sup> “To us, the men and women of these stories were strong, daring and heroic,” he confides, “and therefore we could and did relate to these heroes by means of poetry, song and paint.”<sup>2</sup> Appearing to national critical acclaim in the 1930s and 1940s, the inspiration for his multi-part narrative series, *Frederick Douglass*, a work of 32 panels he painted between 1938-39 while he was living in Harlem, emerged from his exposure to the heroism of the “men and women of these stories” as communicated via oral histories and as preserved in folkloric testimony. “I grew up during the Depression when older people talked on street corners – we called them soap box speakers, and they would talk about black heroes and heroines,” he confirms.<sup>3</sup> For Lawrence and many more Black poets, musicians, and painters working across the twentieth-century, “strong, daring and heroic black heroes and heroines” were a source not only of historical drama but of emotional identification and political transformation. As he conceded, “I wanted to carry my feelings about these various individuals into my paintings.”<sup>4</sup>

Working to interrogate the boundaries of aesthetic experimentation across his *Frederick Douglass* series, Lawrence succeeded in finding a new visual and textual

language in which to do powerful justice to hidden histories of Black heroism. Whereas it had been an act of philosophical and political liberation for Frederick Douglass himself to defy any and all forms of representational fixity by focusing instead upon the “multitudinous” possibilities of textual experimentation and visual reimagining when it came to his own face and body, let alone his life story and his intellectual and moral power as an orator and author, for social justice artists such as Jacob Lawrence who were taking inspiration from his activism and authorship, it was imperative that he become a point of origin, a Founding Father in a Black revolutionary tradition, and a steadying compass point for acts of radicalism, reform, and resistance in the African Atlantic world.<sup>5</sup> No less warring against the centuries long invisibilization of Black agency and artistry, Lawrence was as preoccupied as Douglass with creating new narratives, alternative histories, and revisionist memories in a lifelong determination to give the lie to the misreadings, misconstructions, and misunderstandings of Black heroic figures which have continued to dominate within a white supremacist US imaginary.

“Having no Negro history makes the Negro feel inferior to the rest of the world,” Lawrence observes. All his life, he held onto his conviction that, “I don’t see how a history of the United States can be written honestly without including the Negro.”<sup>6</sup> Just as Frederick Douglass sought to dramatize the untold story of Madison Washington, a man who had been born into slavery in Virginia and who went on to lead a rebellion of enslaved men aboard the *Creole* slave ship in November 1841, in his historical novella, *The Heroic Slave*, which he authored in 1853, nearly a century later Jacob Lawrence fought to memorialize the life and works of Douglass himself in his multi-part narrative series.<sup>7</sup> In the same way that Douglass rejected the limitations of the western slave narrative form in favor of experimenting with the imaginative

possibilities of the novella as a means to dramatize the psychological, intellectual, and philosophical complexities of Washington's life, Lawrence generated a call and response relationship between text and image in order to come to grips with not one but with many Frederick Douglasses across his narrative series. Working to counter the widespread annihilation of Black historical figures in twentieth-century US society, Lawrence experimented with the revolutionary possibilities of a complex visual and textual language in his *Frederick Douglass* series. Working nearly a century apart, the lives and works of Douglass and Lawrence betray their shared realization regarding the urgency of memorializing the "strong, daring and heroic" histories of Black women, children, and men who have, at best, existed only in folkloric memory and who have, at worst, been consigned to the white racist archive Douglass himself dismissed as "chattel records."<sup>8</sup>

Sharing Douglass's commitment to the contemporary relevance of historical struggles – and as especially in evidence in his translation of Madison Washington's heroism into a call to revolutionary arms for enslaved and newly self-emancipated people living in the 1850s - Lawrence sheds light on the rationale for his reimagining and reimagining of Douglass's life in the early twentieth-century by explaining, "I didn't do it just as a historical thing, but because I believe these things tie up with the Negro today. We don't have a physical slavery, but an economic slavery."<sup>9</sup> For Lawrence, the only way in which to begin to combat the body-and-soul-destroying force of a contemporary "economic slavery" which had its roots in the centuries long era of a "physical slavery" was to turn to Black heroes from history. "If these people, who were so much worse off than the people today, could conquer their slavery," he was insistent that, "we certainly can do the same thing."<sup>10</sup> For Lawrence, no less than for Douglass, Black heroic role models signify as symbolic touchstones for

inspiration as well as catalysts for social and political revolutionary change. Asking “[h]ow will it come about?” regarding his lifelong quest to usher in a non-discriminatory and non-persecutory society based on egalitarian principles, Lawrence answered, “I don’t know,” readily conceding, “I’m not a politician. I’m an artist, just trying to do my part to bring this thing about.”<sup>11</sup> While he admitted to his lack of knowledge regarding the most effective means by which to inaugurate radical reform, on one principle he remained immovable. He brooked no dissent to argue that, “Any leadership would have to be the type of Frederick Douglass.”<sup>12</sup>

For Lawrence working as an activist artist to end all systems of social, political, and legal discrimination facing Black women, children, and men living in the twentieth century, Douglass’s nineteenth-century antislavery agitation and civil rights campaigning offered the definitive blueprint from which to build a new “leadership.” As a painter who was dedicated to eradicating the contemporary stranglehold exerted by an “economic slavery,” he was insistent that, “It’s the same thing Douglass meant when he said, ‘Judge me not by the heights to which I have risen but by the depths from which I have come.’”<sup>13</sup> As a comparative investigation into their lives and works testifies, as it was for Douglass so it was for Lawrence: Black heroic role models were all powerful not as celebratory icons of a mythic exceptionalism but as fallible human beings whose ability to liberate themselves from the unspeakable suffering of a historical “physical slavery,” let alone its traumatizing contemporary legacies, was a source of inspiration for the anonymous millions of African diasporic peoples still struggling for survival. As Douglass had himself predicted, it was not only the “spirit of slavery” but the “spirit of mastery” that continued to injure, wound, destroy, and annihilate Black lives: past, present, and future.

\* \* \*

Lawrence titles the first section of his *Frederick Douglass* narrative series “THE SLAVE” and he opens with a multi-part tableau in which he establishes Douglass’s enslaved biographical origins by providing a panoramic view of women and men undertaking back-breaking labor during slavery.<sup>14</sup> Various bent over or erect, yet scarcely discernible, women and men tote burdens or carry tools as Lawrence testifies to the hidden history of their labor over the generations: Douglass’s “depths from which I have come” define his visual lexicon here. As diminutive and faceless figures, their red and yellow clothing does little to detract from Lawrence’s use of black for their shirts, pants, and hats as their bodies emerge in poignant call and response relation to the bleak and barren landscape he has populated with angular trees. Clearly visualizing the “worn-out district” of his accompanying textual caption and of Douglass’s own remembering regarding the “general dilapidation” of his childhood landscape, threatening tree limbs fracture the picture plane and segment the canvas to create hard-hitting vignettes in which he memorializes the terrors and tragedies of slavery.<sup>15</sup> In this panel a solitary man walks with his head bowed in confirmation of his daily struggles; depopulated cabins and arid land dominate a barren landscape and lay to waste the myth of slavery as a source of profit to the US nation; men march with spades while they adopt exactly the same bodily posture as a testament to the dehumanizing realities of their enforced labor; a single woman totes a burden on her head; a group of children as oblivious to slavery as a very young Douglass himself engage in acts of expressive play as they demonstrate an individual’s natural right to

freedom in ways that are otherwise incompatible with these dystopian, sepia-colored scenes of unimaginable human suffering.

Working to memorialize the physical and psychological entrapment experienced by Black women, children, and men as they fought for self-liberation from the abuses and atrocities of their unending slavery, the distended tree limbs intersect with the horizontal and vertical planes of the cabin walls to create an imprisoning grid in Lawrence's first panel. Yet more poignantly, rows of identical cabins disappear into the distance to reinforce their enslaved inhabitants' shared sense of powerlessness and lack of free will. The silhouetted outline of a tree occupies the center of this panel and assumes hard-hitting importance as a visual reminder of the centuries of illegal lynchings experienced by enslaved and free Black populations. Working to shore up his protest against the immorality of acts of white racist terrorism, Lawrence opts for a deliberate distortion of scale: as a result, his tree assumes the same size as his Black protagonist in this image. For Lawrence, the solitary tree with blackened limbs functions as a harrowing symbol for the bodies of women, children, and men who have been and continue to be subjected to untold sufferings and unremembered sacrifices at the hands of white persecutory mobs. This traumatizing and terror-inspiring context acts as an emotionally unequivocal backdrop for his dramatic reimagining of Douglass's life: as Lawrence narrates, 'it was here that Frederick Douglass was born.'<sup>16</sup>

In contrast to his first image showing many anonymous enslaved people, Lawrence's second panel dramatizes only two figures – Douglass and his mother – in an interior rather than an exterior view of cabin life. He narrows his panoramic lens to shore up the unequivocal emotional power of his intimate portrayal of Douglass's maternal origins in this panel. A haunting visualization of the Black pieta dominates

this scene as Douglass appears as a child seated at the feet of the bowed figure of his mother. The caption does justice to this mother's son's emotional wounding in his lifelong heartbreaking sense of loss by reading in part, "The only recollections he had of his mother were those few hasty visits she made to him during the night."<sup>17</sup> In this panel, Lawrence relies on a powerful use of color symbolism to heighten the dramatic tension of his visual re-enactment of one of Douglass's rare reunions with his mother. The yellow of the candle exists in call and response relation to the yellow of Douglass's shirt and the cabin floor to indicate his meteoric rise from humble origins while the red flame replicates his mother's clothing to suggest her undying spiritual and non-corporeal significance as a source of inspiration all his life. According to Lawrence's reimagining, Harriet Bailey transcended her victimized status in slavery not only through her own acts of agency – which included her inspirational ability to read and write - but through her relationship with her son which became the foundation for his own philosophy of self-liberation. As Douglass himself remembered, "I learned, after my mother's death, that she could read, and that she was the only one of all the slaves and colored people in Tuckahoe who enjoyed that advantage." For Douglass, it was his mother's heroism that defined his own. Recognizing that "the achievement of my mother, considering the place, was very extraordinary," Douglass remained adamant that, "in view of that fact, I am quite willing, and even happy, to attribute any love of letters I possess, and for which I have got - despite of prejudices - only too much credit, not to my admitted Anglo-Saxon paternity, but to the native genius of my sable, unprotected, and uncultivated mother."<sup>18</sup>

In this panel, audiences similarly look up to Douglass's mother by sharing his child perspective as the upward trajectory of the walls encourage their



identification with his point of view. At the same time that this image does justice to the power of their mother-child relationship, the hunched over and angular form of Harriet Bailey – an enslaved woman who died a tragically premature death - ultimately testifies to her exposure to unimaginable sorrow and unspeakable pain during her all too brief life. As Douglass himself powerfully writes, “Death soon ended the little communication that had existed between us; and with it, I believe, a life - judging from her weary, sad, down-cast countenance and mute demeanor - full of heart-felt sorrow.”<sup>19</sup> Lawrence lends yet further weight to Douglass’s memory of his mother’s “heart-felt sorrow” by reimagining her hunched over body in ways that visual resonate with the bowed over figure of an unidentified woman he later depicts in his *Migration of the Negro* series which he painted in 1941. As the accompanying caption to his water-color work reveals, this grief-stricken woman experiences personal devastation and harrowing desolation after witnessing a lynching: *Another cause was lynching. It was found that where there had been a lynching, the people who were reluctant to leave it first left immediately after this.*<sup>20</sup> According to Lawrence’s vision, the persecutory practices of an eighteenth and nineteenth-century “physical slavery” live on within the contemporary reality of an “economic slavery” as an incontestable way in which to reinforce his conviction that cycles of racist abuse and inequality are without end in a twentieth-century white supremacist era.

Lawrence’s detailed representation of the diagonal, horizontal, and vertical wooden boards of this cabin ultimately overwhelm his diminutive representation of this Black mother and child. According to his interlocking representation they resemble bars to shore up his visual testament to past and present systems of slavery as sites of human powerlessness. And yet, Lawrence ultimately foregrounds Black agency in the face of annihilation by dramatizing the reciprocal and mutual exchange

that occurs between the mother's downturned face and the son's upturned expression. According to his reimagining, Douglass may well be a role model to his audiences but his mother was no less his role model and inspiration for his future heroism. Yet more revealingly, without the specificity of his caption in which Lawrence explicitly references Douglass's life, they could be any mother and child. While Douglass himself countered the widespread circulation of white racist caricatures of Black people by creating meticulously accurate photographic portraits of his own physiognomy, Lawrence deliberately minimizes his individualism in order to examine Douglass's life story as a touchstone for an investigation into the sufferings and sacrifices not only of untold millions of Black families during slavery but of their descendants still fighting for an existence in a contemporary era as defined by trauma, torture, and death. As Frederick Douglass, Jacob Lawrence, and Harriet Bailey were all too aware, there was no end to the ways in which Black women, children, and men could die in a US nation that was for whites only.

Lawrence's determination to provide emotional close-ups as a way of contextualizing Black male resistance within everyday, anonymous Black female heroism structures the composition of his third panel. In contrast to the stoic resilience of Douglass's mother, his visual representation of the radical militancy of a woman he identifies as Millie is likely to have been inspired by Douglass's subsequent retellings of the resistance of Nelly, a woman who assumed center-stage in his second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, which he published in 1855. On first glance, this is a despondent image as the text reads: "When old enough to work, he was taken to Colonel Lloyd's slave master. His first introduction to the realities of the slave system was the flogging of Millie, a slave on the Lloyd plantation."<sup>21</sup> And yet, while Millie's posture replicates Douglass's mother's bowed down angular body,

Lawrence's technique of repetition with variation across panels accentuates the importance of shifting contexts as an identically contorted stature ultimately works not to suggest despair but resilience in this panel.

Initially as despondent as Douglass's mother in this image, Millie's head is bowed while she wears the same white apron to lay bare her daily struggles and sacrifices as an enslaved woman living in domestic slavery. However, in contrast to Douglass's mother's hands which are passively folded in her lap, Millie's hand tenaciously holds the tree beside her. No spiritual or emotional pieta of suffering, Millie's is a fight for survival against the white man's determination to whip her and write his oppression as a "living parchment" on her back.<sup>22</sup> In a stark departure for this series, neither Millie nor the white slaveholder are faceless. And yet, Lawrence nevertheless succeeds in maintaining the barriers between his audience and his Black subjects as Millie self-protectively holds one hand up to her face. As a result, viewers only have access to her eyes which are expressive of her emotional conflict and testify to her determination to resist as well as her very real fear. The barred teeth of the pink-colored white man who looms above her as his hands are gripped around her body attest to his barbaric ferocity. No source of despair, however, Lawrence relies on a characteristically telling discrepancy between text and image with the result that while the caption describes a 'flogging of Milly,' no such scene of violence is the subject of this painting: the whip with which the white man had hoped to beat Millie hangs prominently, untouched and out of reach, in the foreground of this work.

In this panel, Lawrence's color symbolism is at work again as the yellow color of the whip resonates with Millie's yellow head-wrap as well as Douglass's yellow shirt to suggest a heroic continuum that encompasses deeds of female as well as male bravery. For Lawrence, Douglass's heroism emerges not in a vacuum but as a

result of differing forms of Black female militancy as ranging from his mother's fight to see him at night and her literacy on through to Millie's acts of physical resistance. In contrast to the two enslaved children whose facial features are outlined but barely visible and with whom he stands while he watches the whipping, Douglass's eyes are as wide open as Millie's as he bears witness to this scene. No traumatizing signifier for lynched bodies, the tree that Millie grasps for dear life has faintly blossoming leaves. Here Lawrence may well be introducing the possibility of a future rebirth in later freedoms that are only made possible by earlier acts of resistance in slavery.

As the iconic set piece of the series, panel 10 dramatizes one of the most celebrated moments in Douglass's life history: the repeatedly restaged and reimagined battle with white slave-trader, Edward Covey.<sup>23</sup> As dramatized in Douglass's own autobiographies and speeches, this epic moment of male heroism also appears in Lawrence's series to reflect a masculinized revisualization of Black female heroism. As a visual recreation of Millie's brave resistance to a 'flogging' which he depicted as victorious in panel 3, Lawrence's accompanying heroic caption is no less equivocal than his painting: "A second attempt by Covey to flog Douglass was unsuccessful. This was one of the most important incidents in the life of Frederick Douglass: he was never attacked again by Covey. His philosophy: a slave easily flogged is flogged oftener; a slave who resists flogging is flogged less."<sup>24</sup> In this panel, a vision of Douglass's physical domination over Covey visually inverts the white overseer's looming presence over Millie. At the same time, the whip remains as untouched and similarly occupies the left-hand side of the painting as in the earlier work.

A celebration of Black male physical empowerment, Lawrence's focus in this panel is upon the spectacle of Douglass's half-naked physical form as his upper torso remains unclothed to reveal his exemplary musculature. As Rebecca Cobby

perceptively asserts, while such nakedness “could expose Douglass as uncivilised and animalistic” by playing into white racist stereotypes surrounding Black manhood, Lawrence’s decision to contrast his visualization of the Black male body with the white man’s concealed physicality ultimately works to the latter’s disadvantage.<sup>25</sup> Covey’s yellow and red checked patterned shirt deflates him of epic righteousness by suggesting a comic twist in the gaudy coloring of his attire that is reminiscent of theatrical costumes. Lawrence’s message could not be more clear-cut: while Douglass is a source of sublime heroism in his awe-inspiring courage, Covey is a signifier for white male inferiority and cowardice and as such, a point of satire, humor, bathos, and ultimately, ridicule. While white masculinity is performative and artificial, Black masculinity is portrayed as self-evident and heroic. A far from straightforward endorsement of Black liberation, however, the bridle that hangs from a nail on the left-hand side of this painting is visually suggestive of a noose. Working to complicate the uplifting heroic trajectory of this image, Lawrence testifies to his realization that the fight against white male oppression remains far from over in a contemporary era in which lynchings remained an ongoing and widespread practice.

Ultimately, Lawrence’s *Frederick Douglass* narrative series was inspired by the same motivation which had guided Douglass’s political philosophy a century earlier. There was a shared determination to create a radical and revolutionary and, above all, consciousness-raising, body of work in which they sought to memorialize Black heroic figures in order to bear witness to their conviction that the fight for social, political, and historical change for all Black people was to endure beyond their lifetimes as the unfinished work of future generations.

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“‘We don’t know the story, how historians have glossed over the Negro’s part as one of the builders of America,’” declares Jacob Lawrence. Here he voices his direct opposition to the willful erasure and deliberate eradication of African American heroism from all dominant histories of the US nation’s founding.<sup>26</sup> As an antidote to all such annihilations, Lawrence’s *Frederick Douglass* series is an inspirational meditation on Black revolutionary history. A tour-de-force, his multi-part work represents a direct, dramatic, and imaginative visual re-enactment of the ambiguities and ambivalence of self-representation at work within Douglass’s own autobiographies, photographs, historical novella, and oral performances. Across this narrative series and his many more that he dedicated to recovering and recreating the lives of Toussaint Louverture, Harriet Tubman and John Brown, Lawrence sought to honor the oral storytelling traditions of his upbringing. As he readily concedes, “‘I’ve been hearing the stories of these heroes and heroines ever since I was a child.’”<sup>27</sup>

While they lived and worked over a century apart, Douglass and Lawrence were equally committed to the art no less than the act of reimagining and representing Black heroism. As activist-artists-authors who directly confronted the impossibility of any single work to do justice to the complexities of the lives and works of historical Black heroic figures, just as Douglass told and retold his life story across numerous autobiographies, speeches, essays and portraits, Lawrence’s decision to create numerous narrative series, including his *Frederick Douglass* series, was equally born of a political as well as an artistic necessity. As he realized only too well, “I couldn’t paint the life of Harriet Tubman or Frederick Douglass in one painting” with the immediate result that, “I decided to do their stories in a number of paintings.”<sup>28</sup> On these grounds, his multi-panel and ambiguously captioned works possess the

monumental scope of an epic-sized, panoramic mural. At the same time, they betray none of the tendencies toward creating a singular or unified version of events which would run the risk of eliding the interpretative difficulties generated by a white racist imaginary.

For Lawrence, the narrative series assumes revolutionary importance as a catalyst to debating all aspects of the freedom struggle on the grounds that, “you can tell a story, you can tell many episodes. *It’s like chapters in a book.*” As he soon realized, “what I couldn’t do in one painting I could do in a series of paintings.”<sup>29</sup> Across his *Frederick Douglass* series, Lawrence juxtaposes a multiplicity of perspectives via specific versus generic shots to illuminate his exhaustively well-researched examination and deeply emotionally immersion into Douglass’s life. Far from straightforward, he betrays the extent to which he shared Douglass’s own reservations regarding the ways in which his life story was co-opted as the only one within a white racist imaginary in which tokenistic exceptions were the rule. Across his emotionally charged water color paintings, he debates the efficacy of a reliance on Douglass’s exceptional biography as the lens through which he is able to bear unflinching witness to the suffering of millions of women, children, and men living and dying in slavery.

Ultimately, Frederick Douglass’s key tension was also Jacob Lawrence’s major issue: how to ensure that Black heroic icons, enslaved and free, were understood not only in and of themselves but also in terms of their capacity to symbolize the lives and deaths of untold millions of enslaved women, men, and children lost to official history. Working centuries apart, Douglass and Lawrence recognized that neither text nor image alone could reveal these otherwise elided heroic histories. Rather, as their mixed media works demonstrate, it was only via a

combination of literary and visual forms that they were able to generate self-reflexive works in order to guarantee the emergence of more accurate histories. Far from self-evident, across their works, audiences were invited to recreate and reimagine unknown histories from partial, fragmented, and necessarily highly dramatized adaptations.

Living centuries apart, Jacob Lawrence and Frederick Douglass were equally inspired by a determination to reimagine the lives and works of “strong, daring and heroic black heroes and heroines” as the default filter through which to communicate their shared commitment to a call to revolutionary arms. As Lawrence observed, ““It would be very unfortunate if... we don’t have the will.. to put up a resistance.””<sup>30</sup> As for Douglass so it was for Lawrence: ““Struggle... is a beautiful thing – beautiful in the sense that there’s some hope.””<sup>31</sup> In a twenty-first century in which the omnipresence of white racist hate, white racist torture, and white racist persecution against African diasporic populations is only tightening its grip in western societies, “hope” is at the heart of any and all languages of liberation.

As Frederick Douglass himself remembered of the enslaved women and men who undertook one of the most heroic escape attempts in US history by courageously commandeering a ship called the *Pearl* in Washington D.C. in April 1848 a bid for their collective freedoms, it was only “When the slaves on board of the ‘Pearl’ were overtaken, arrested, and carried to prison - their hopes for freedom blasted,” that as “they marched in chains they sang, and found (as Emily Edmunson tells us) a melancholy relief in singing.” As Douglass poignantly confides, “The singing of a man cast away on a desolate island, might be as appropriately considered an evidence of his contentment and happiness, as the singing of a slave. Sorrow and desolation have their songs, as well as joy and peace. Slaves sing more to make themselves



happy, than to express their happiness.”<sup>32</sup> For Frederick Douglass, no less than for Jacob Lawrence, it is only when hope ends that artistic expression as self and collective liberation begins.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Lawrence, “Statement by Jacob Lawrence, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1978.” In *The Legend of John Brown*, ed. Ellen Sharp (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1978): 14.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Anon., “Jacob Lawrence: unpublished interview,” April and May 1992: n.p. Jacob Lawrence Papers, Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> For Douglass “multitudinous” is a word he repeatedly uses across his bodies of work to signal his lifelong determination to develop an all encompassing language in which to begin to do justice to the vast array of experiences endured by women, children and men, enslaved and free.

<sup>6</sup> Qtd. in Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: American Painter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 40.

<sup>7</sup> See Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, in Julia Griffiths, ed., *Autographs for Freedom* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1853).

<sup>8</sup> Douglass uses this phrase “chattel records” to deplore the racist ways in which Madison Washington’s heroism is entirely obliterated within white racist official archives. See Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, 175.

<sup>9</sup> Qtd. in Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence*, 40.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>14</sup> This panel can be accessed in Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: The Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman Series of 1938-40* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 49.
- <sup>15</sup> Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, ed. Celeste-Marie Bernier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 37.
- <sup>16</sup> See Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: The Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman Series of 1938-40*, 49.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.
- <sup>18</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 52.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.
- <sup>20</sup> Panel 15 of this series is reproduced as the cover of Celeste-Marie Bernier's *African American Visual Arts: From Slavery to the Present* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008). For a reproduction of the caption see page 118 of this same volume.
- <sup>21</sup> Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: The Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman Series of 1938-40*, 51.
- <sup>22</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 129.
- <sup>23</sup> Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: The Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman Series of 1938-40*, 58.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>25</sup> Rebecca Cobby, *The Representation of African American Men in Black Visual Art* (Ph.D. University of Nottingham, 2011), 7. Kasia Boddy investigates Lawrence's *Frederick Douglass* narrative series in her book, *Boxing: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 77.
- <sup>26</sup> Qtd. in Bernier, *African American Visual Arts*, 113.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Anon., “Jacob Lawrence: unpublished interview,” April and May 1992: n.p. Jacob Lawrence Papers, Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

<sup>29</sup> Qtd. in Nathan Grant, “Image and Text in Jacob Lawrence,” *Black American Literature Forum*, 23.3 (1989): 523.

<sup>30</sup> Qtd. in Bernier, *African American Visual Arts*, 111.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, **52.CHECK**